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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003625

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SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON GENERAL PALLOP PINMANEE

REF: A. TD 40211-07 (5/32/07)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5204

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: Controversial retired general Pallop Pinmanee has a very limited role as an advisor in the Internal Security Operations Command. This message provides background on the general in response to incorrect press reporting which identified him as a "top security advisor" to the RTG with a leading role in the South. END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

[1](#)2. (U) GEN Pallop Pinmanee retired from the military in [1](#)1996. He was appointed as senator in 1996, and also served as Assistant Secretary to the Defense Minister in 1997. He was PM Thaksin's Advisor for Security Affairs from 2001-2002. He was named Deputy Director for ISOC (Internal Security Operations Command) and given specific responsibility for the South as director of the Southern Border Provinces Peace Promotion Command - Pattani in 2002. His responsibilities for the South ended in April 2004, following the attack on the "Krue Se" mosque. On that day, security forces repelled multiple attacks by insurgents in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces. A group of the insurgents took refuge in the Krue Se mosque, and held out there for about nine hours. GEN Pallop, contravening orders from his superiors, ordered troops to storm the mosque, reportedly after negotiations failed and three soldiers were killed. Thirty-two insurgents were killed in the attack. GEN Pallop was removed as Director of the Southern Border Provinces Peace Promotion Command but, with the apparent backing of PM Thaksin, retained his position as Deputy ISOC director. (The PM himself was director, leaving Pallop with effective responsibility for day-to-day operations.) Pallop kept this post until August, 2006, when ISOC personnel, including Pallop's driver, were accused of organizing an assassination attempt on Thaksin's life. (Note: REF B notes widespread doubts about whether this whole incident was a fabrication of some kind. End Note.) Pallop, when questioned about his role in the alleged bombing, told the press, "You know me. If I were behind it, I would not have missed."

[1](#)3. (C) This swaggering braggadocio is typical for GEN Pallop, who relishes a place in the spotlight and carefully cultivates his reputation as a force to be reckoned with, despite his advancing age. GEN Pallop was one of the "Young Turks" - a group of army officers involved in several of the coups -- attempted and successful -- of the 1970's and 1980's. He was, by his own account, a bit player in the 1976 coup, which led to the installation of an extreme right-wing government. He claims a more substantial role in the 1977 bloodless coup, which installed Kriangsak Chomanan as Prime

Minister. (Kriangsak is credited with trying to return the country to parliamentary democracy, and with helping to end the communist insurgency in Thailand by issuing an amnesty to insurgents -- and by improving relations with China.) Pallop also claims a role in the 1981 attempted coup against Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda, although he had been viewed as a Prem protege. (He told the press he was "tricked" into supporting this coup). As a result of his role in the 1981 failed coup, he had to flee to Laos. He returned following the issuance of an amnesty. However, he claimed that he suffered mistreatment from other officers, and he blamed his former friend Army commander Arthit for these insults. He claims that he attempted to kill Arthit seven times "and Arthit knew it" but Arthit escaped because he "was just lucky." Pallop has also said that he and Arthit later reconciled.

ANTI-COMMUNIST CAMPAIGNER, ASSASSIN

¶4. (C) Like most Thai military officers of his generation, Pallop was closely involved in the fight against the Communist insurgency. He has boasted of his membership in a "Special Thai Ranger" team in the mid 1960's, when he worked in Laos. He also served in Vietnam. Upon his return to Thailand, around 1970, he claims that he was part of a team set up to kill communists in Thailand. He has refused to elaborate on his activities or name any of his victims.

¶5. (C) Comment: How much of what Pallop says is true, how much fiction? His claims about his role in various coups appears to be true, and not surprising. The "Young Turks," a strongly anti-Communist and anti-corruption movement, was

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involved in much of the political upheaval of the 70's and 80's. Most other members of this cohort are retired. One prominent Young Turk still active in political life is Chamlong Srimuang, former Bangkok governor, MP, and leader of protests against military dictator Suchinda and, more recently, former PM Thaksin. We cite this as an example to show that Thailand has long accepted the "Young Turks" back into the political fold. They have been rehabilitated.

¶6. (C) Comment continued: Pallop's accounts of assassinating communists may well be somewhat inflated, but it is a matter of historical record that governments in Thailand, as in Laos and South Vietnam, used targeted assassinations of communist leaders as one method to suppress their insurgencies. US support for these tactics in some cases is also a matter of historical record. Regarding his declared alleged vendetta against GEN Arthit, a press report from July 2006 listed seven attempts on Arthit's life during the year 1982 (he was a very unpopular general). Pallop's interview, in which he claimed to be responsible for these attacks, was given about a month after that press report. We are not aware of previous claims by Pallop to have tried to kill Arthit, and it seems possible that he simply read the press report in a popular newspaper, and decided to take credit.

ISOC REDUX

¶7. (C) Because ISOC turns up several times in Pallop's colorful biography, we provide here a very short history. ISOC was the RTG's vehicle for coordinating the fight against the communist insurgency in the 1970's and 80's, "coordinating" the security forces by giving the military control over police. Once the insurgency was over, ISOC went into decline. It became a dumping ground for the most incompetent members of the security forces, as police and military kept their better subordinates and fobbed off the least capable, or those who had lost favor with their bosses. During the late 1990's there was an attempt to revive ISOC to deal with transnational problems such as drug trafficking and refugees, but the organization never recovered its lustre.

¶8. (C) After the September 2006 coup, military leaders began to talk about the possibility of rebuilding ISOC, viewing it as one way to break down the chronic stovepiping between security agencies that has so hindered Thai security efforts, particularly in the south. They planned a new legal mandate for the organization, and talked about basing it on the model US Homeland Security. GEN Sonthi, as army commander, took the helm at ISOC. Little progress was made, however, on reforming the organization.

¶9. (C) On May 3, Pallop was appointed as "Advisor" to the ISOC director. This provoked a flurry of speculative articles, and a chance for Pallop to trot out his best bon mots for the press. Both PM Surayud and GEN Sonthi quickly quashed rumors that Pallop was brought back to manage operations in the South. One press report identified him as the "public relations advisor" to ISOC, but in fact his role seems to be undefined. GEN Sonthi made a point of saying that Pallop controls no personnel and has no operational authority. Based on what we have seen so far, this is true. We note that Pallop is not a security advisor to the government, or to the Army, but only to GEN Sonthi in his limited capacity as ISOC director.

¶10. (C) So what is he doing? Pallop told the press that his main role would be to try to discourage anti-government demonstrators. His experience using the ISOC information network (allegedly 700,000 volunteers) was given as one reason to bring him back. Another was that he was seen as loyal to GEN Sonthi, who was a particular target of the protesters (REF A). Pallop emphasized that he would use persuasion, and not force, to keep demonstrators from descending on Bangkok. While evidence of his activities is still limited, we did catch a glimpse of his work on a trip to the Northeast (Thaksin country) earlier this week. A former MP, and strong Thaksin supporter, discussed the efforts of his former Thai-Rak-Thai faction to form a new party under new leadership. He recounted a phone call he had recently received from GEN Pallop's assistant. The assistant passed along a message, urging the MP to remain peaceful, and promising that he would have a new party soon, with a new leader, "a general, and a very good guy." The MP speculated that "the general" in question might be GEN Sonthi -- rumored to be planning to join a party formed with this TRT faction.

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(There are, however, several retired generals looking for parties to lead, so we won't jump to a conclusion yet.)

COMMENT

¶11. (C) We note that no contacts here have raised concerns about Pallop or his role. Our Human Rights Watch contact rolled his eyes and scoffed at the idea that Pallop had any responsibilities in the South. When we ask, the general reaction is that the appointment, like a number of others, was a stupid idea. Pallop is still hated in the South for his role at Krue Se, he's a blowhard and an embarrassment. However, he is a loyal blowhard, wily, and with a network of contacts in the countryside that may be useful in monitoring possible anti-government activities. Under Thaksin, he had actual positions of responsibility - being the PM's deputy with responsibility for the day-to-day operations of ISOC, PM's advisor for security affairs, and director of an important institution in the South. Now, he is just the "advisor" in ISOC, rather than its boss. Overall, we would assess that he has come down in the world, although not yet far enough.

BOYCE